

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."

March/April 2010



WRESTLING WITH WESLEY'S GOSPEL

DETECTING TRACES OF LIMITED UNIVERSALISM

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EDITOR
Shawn Brace

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Bill Brace

PROOFREADING EDITOR
Wanda Hopkins

LAYOUT DESIGN/PRINTER
L. Brown and Sons Printing, Inc.
1-800-486-1947

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR
(603) 287-1863
www.newenglandpastor.com
newenglandpastor@gmail.com

ADDRESS:
30 Floyd Avenue, #8
West Lebanon, NH 03784

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Safe to Save? by Shawn Brace

Are you safe to save? It may sound like a funny question—especially to a pastor—but it is one that has incredible import. We know, of course, that it is God’s highest desire that “all men” and women might “be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4).¹ But there is also another important objective in Christ’s grand plan of salvation: He wants to restore the universe to complete harmony, security, and safety.

Think about it for a second: would *you* want one of your neighbors in heaven to be a person who merely professed Christ with his or her lips and yet was a murderer? Don’t get me wrong: any person who, by God’s grace, repents and turns away from sin has a place in God’s heavenly mansions—no matter how speckled his or her past life has been. But Christ is pretty clear when He says that “to him who *overcomes*” (see Revelation 2:7, etc.) He will grant the privilege of ultimately being saved. Thus, if a person has not “overcome” here on earth, he or she will not “overcome” in heaven.²

And this is good news, not bad news. We see this illustrated in our government here in the United States, which grants every citizen freedom and liberty—but this is the important part—*so long as that person’s freedoms and liberties do not encroach upon someone else’s freedoms and liberties*. Our Constitution is set up in such a way that it provides freedom and protections, not only for the individual, but for every individual.

And this is the fine balance that God is seeking to achieve here in this universe. He desperately wants *everyone* to live forever with Him, but if there is a person who, by being granted eternal life, endangers the freedoms and liberties and safety of anyone else in the universe, then

God has no choice but to exclude that person from eternity. As Nahum 1:9 tells us, “Affliction will not rise up a second time.” This is Christ’s goal—to make sure that affliction, distress, and trouble do not creep into the universe’s existence ever again, after Satan and the wicked are destroyed. Thus, any rebellion whatsoever—however minimal—that remains in our hearts will have to be eradicated *here and now* if we wish to enjoy eternity. As Herbert Douglass puts it, “Let’s remember that the ultimate purpose of the gospel is to prepare a people who can be *trusted* with eternal life.”³

Notice also these powerful words, expressed 120 years ago:

Were justice extinct, and were it possible for divine mercy to open the gates to the whole race, irrespective of character, there would be a worse condition of disaffection and rebellion in heaven than before Satan was expelled. The peace, happiness, and harmony of heaven would be broken up. The change from earth to heaven will not change men’s characters; the happiness of the redeemed in heaven results from the characters formed in this life, after the image of Christ. The saints in heaven will first have been saints on earth.⁴

Doesn’t this speak to God’s awesome goodness? He wants everyone to be eternally saved—yet He also wants to make this universe eternally safe. And so, in His infinite wisdom, He figures out the balance between the two.

Incidentally, I shared this same thought a few months ago on my blog and, to my utter surprise, there was a young non-Adventist couple that I know who responded very positively to this idea. They were thrilled to hear it. I believe this was largely because they had been seriously wronged by someone in the church they attended, and no one was doing anything about it. They have since stopped attending church altogether as they try to allow

their wounds to heal. And they recognize all too acutely that not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” should automatically be saved eternally.

Sadly, many within our own ranks do not appreciate the full beauty of this truth. It is quickly placed under the umbrella of “legalism” or “salvation by works,” as if an attempt by God to completely rid the universe of rebellion is a bad thing. But Christ, through the pen of Paul, invites all of us to “be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Romans 12:2). All by God’s grace, of course—beautiful, boundless, measureless grace.

So, in the end, you and I will be able to sleep peacefully at night in heaven, knowing that we will always have pleasant and loving neighbors!

- 1 All Scriptures, unless otherwise indicated, taken from the New King James Version.
- 2 I am not here implying that a person needs to be perfect in the “absolute” sense, but that each person learns how to continually say “yes” to God whenever His Spirit invites him or her to do so.
- 3 Herbert E. Douglass, *Should We Ever Say “I Am Saved”?* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2003), 104. Emphasis supplied.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 731.

Shawn Brace pastors four congregations in New Hampshire and Vermont. He and his wife, Camille, live in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, and they recently welcomed their first child, Camden Shawn, into the world. He also published his first book, *Waiting at the Altar*, in 2008. When he isn’t busy with pastoring, he loves spending time outdoors—especially photographing the beauty of New England.



Wrestling with Wesley's Gospel—Part 2

by Steven Grabiner

This article is Part 2. Part 1 was in the January/February 2010 issue, also available at www.newenglandpastor.com.
—Editors

Preventing grace

Wesley has drawn a picture of human nature that is in total need of redemption. His description raises the question, how does one come to God? How is the cycle of self-love broken? What is it that brings a person to conversion and salvation? While some in Anglicanism would argue for a capacity of the will to respond to God's grace (the fall affecting humanity "from the neck down" so to speak), Wesley forcibly argued against any such capacity of the will or of nature. Calvinism's answer is the irresistible grace of God, which elects certain individuals to be saved. Instead of embracing this as the solution to the fall, Wesley argued against it.

Wesley's refusal to accept a Calvinistic view of grace and predestination led to a break with George Whitefield and the Calvinistic Methodists. One of Wesley's main objections to predestination was his concern for God's honor. Wesley did not want to take away human responsibility, and thus place the responsibility for sin upon God. Another concern was his interest in holiness. In his *Dialogue between a Predestinarian and his Friend*, Wesley imagines an illustrative dialogue. Using the Socratic method of questions, and answers he highlights his main point: predestination removes human responsibility and places it back on God. This impugns God's integrity and honor. This point is strengthened by Wesley's inserting quotations from well-known writers into the conversation.

Friend: Sir, I have heard that you make God the author of all sin, and the destroyer of the greater part of mankind without mercy.

Predestinarian: I deny it; I only

say, "God did from all eternity unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass."

Friend: Do you make no exception?

Pred: No, surely; for "nothing is more absurd than to think anything at all is done but by the ordination of God."¹

This is Wesley's main argument. By stating that God has decreed what should happen, the predestinarian has made God the one responsible for both sin and those that are lost, thus effectually mitigating human responsibility. The dialogue continues, with Wesley using selective quotations to demonstrate his view. He showed that Calvinism put God in the position of governing humanity's will and electing the chosen to salvation. The election of some to salvation inevitably "elects" some to condemnation. This occurs either by the direct decree of God or by the lost simply not having been chosen. For Wesley, either of these views reflects on God and takes away human responsibility.

Wesley's central concern is how predestination necessarily depicts God. In his sermon *Free Grace*, Wesley picks up the theme again. He views the doctrine as representing God in a worse light than the devil. After arguing that it makes Christ to be a hypocrite, he states, "It represents the most holy God as worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust. More false; because the devil . . . hath never said, 'He willeth all men to be saved.'"² Unjust, cruel, and hypocritical is how predestination pictures God. Unjust, because people are condemned for sin, when it is only God's grace that could keep them from it. Cruel, because He condemns His creatures to endless

misery, when only He could rescue them. Hypocritical, because He states He wants all to be saved, but won't save them.

Here is the heart of the issue: "This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil."³ It is for this that Wesley rejects the doctrine of predestination, considering it blasphemy.⁴

Wesley's position of holding to original sin, and then rejecting election, appears to give rise to the inconsistency I mentioned in the beginning of this article. If one is totally fallen, without any ability to come to God, how then does one respond to salvation? It is here that there is an apparent contradiction. Wesley poses the question as to why everyone is not saved. His answer is that, although God wants to save them, they *will not* be saved. The lost are such because they refuse God's desire to redeem them. Yet, how could they refuse, if their wills are totally captive to sin?

Wesley hints at his solution, even in the sermon *Original Sin*. Throughout the sermon are short phrases that are inserted as qualifiers to the doctrine. For example, Wesley uses an illustration of two children brought up without religious instruction. He argues that they would not have any religion "unless the grace of God interposed."⁵ Earlier, he writes that the "grace of God" can occasionally work to the good in a soul. He states that "preventing grace" can work in individuals. *Wesley's understanding of salvation demands that the grace of God be at work, not only in the saved, but in everyone.*

What seems to move Wesley to this conclusion is his willingness to give certain passages of Scripture more

weight than is generally given to them. Those passages that have a universal application to them, Wesley often sees as truly applying to all humanity. He frequently uses John 1:9 to describe how God's grace reaches everyone. In his sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, he pushes the borders of the salvation experience. For Wesley, it begins with and includes "the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory." This "first dawning of grace"⁶ occurs in everyone, and is what Wesley equates with the natural conscience. He believed that salvation in its broadest understanding included the work of grace ("preventing grace" as he called it) that is at work in everyone.

In other words, Wesley understood that God's preventing grace works in everyone from birth. This grace *draws* a person to God, and shows them right and wrong. It also *frees* them from the total bondage of the will, so that they can choose to respond to further workings of divine grace. Each one has a measure of free will, but Wesley emphasized that this is the result of the working of God's grace. The capacity of the will, given through preventing grace, Wesley expanded upon in his sermon, *On Conscience*.

In this sermon, he defined conscience as the ability of knowing the value or demerit of our thoughts, words, and actions. He argued that this ability of the will is natural, only in the sense that everyone has it. A measure of free will has been "supernaturally restored to every" one. With this is "that supernatural light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world." This is not to be understood as a faculty of human nature. Rather, it is "the Son of God that is the 'true light, which enlighteneth' all" (John 1:9).⁷

What is of importance here is Wesley's understanding of preventing grace as being "irresistible." There is a significant difference between a

Wesleyan understanding of irresistible grace and a Calvinistic one. Wesley saw grace as irresistibly at work in everyone, granting to them a perception of right and wrong. It also gives to everyone the ability to respond to further drawings of grace. Thus, while original sin has destroyed *everyone's* ability to move toward God, preventing grace has restored this ability to *everyone*. It is in this way that Wesley is able to hold the twin doctrines of total depravity and human responsibility. His understanding of preventing grace shows that God has taken the initiative in redemption and has corrected some of the damage wrought by Adam's fall. For Wesley, none remain

Here is an unexpected aspect of Wesleyan theology. Very few theologians of his day (or today) would have entertained the idea that the righteousness of Christ has had any effect on "all mankind."

untouched by preventing grace. It is the result of God's activity through Christ and does not wait for humanity to request it. "There is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God," he wrote. "No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called 'natural conscience.' But this is not natural; it is more properly termed 'preventing grace.' Every man has a greater or lesser measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man."⁸

Yet, while preventing grace is irresistible and universal, justifying and

sanctifying grace are not. One cannot resist God's first action of grace that enables the will to respond to further actions of grace. However, one can resist the *wooing* of grace toward salvation. It is this resistance that brings condemnation. Calvinism depicts the entire work of grace as irresistible and particular, Wesley saw preventing grace as irresistible and universal.

Limited Universalism

Wesley's resolution for the tension between total depravity and free will is found in his understanding of preventing grace. This grace reaches everyone, and it enables the will to be able to respond to further works of grace. To arrive at this understanding, Wesley allowed the passages of Scripture that compare or parallel Christ with Adam to have a fuller weight than is generally given to them. Having taken the fall of humanity through Adam seriously, now he takes the work of Christ as the Last Adam seriously. For Wesley, preventing grace operates because of the death of Christ. This work of grace is strictly Christocentric. It is founded on the atoning work of Christ. As the sin of Adam has had an effect upon all, so, too, has the life and death of Christ.

The work of Christ as the Last Adam, with its universalistic implications, is brought out through a series of questions in *Late Conversations*. The question is posed, "In what sense is Adam's sin imputed to all mankind?" This is answered by several points, already highlighted in the discussion of original sin. They are: in Adam all die (this includes mortality and separation from God); all have a sinful nature; and all are children of wrath. The next question asks, "In what sense is the righteousness of Christ imputed to *all mankind* or to believers?" (emphasis supplied).

Here is an unexpected aspect of Wesleyan theology. Very few theologians of his day (or today)

would have entertained the idea that the righteousness of Christ has had any effect on “all mankind.” Wesley perceptively notes that there is no express statement in Scripture that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to any. Rather, that faith is counted as righteousness. However, in answer to the question, he quotes from Romans 5:19.

This passage, beginning in verse 12, compares and contrasts Christ with Adam. The passage discusses the effect both have had on humanity. Verse 14 of the passage explicitly states that Adam was “a type of Him who was to come.” The entire passage implies that as Adam’s sin has had some kind of universal effect, so, also, Christ’s death has some universalistic application.

Wesley quotes Romans 5:19, a concluding verse, and then states that “By the merits of Christ all men were cleared from the guilt of Adam’s actual sin.” The condemnation that came to all because of Adam’s transgression is removed by the righteousness of Christ. Through the obedience, death, and resurrection of Christ, humanity has been set upon vantage ground. The human race reaps other benefits as well. These include the promise of immortality for all “after the resurrection”; all have a present capacity for spiritual life; all receive a spark or seed of spiritual life; and, that believers will become children of grace and are made partakers of the divine nature.⁹ The first three of these are universal; only the last two are particular.

In other words, there is an effect of the atonement that reaches to all. As the fall has had a universal aspect, so also has the work of redemption. The conscience, an ability to be receptive to spiritual things, some aspect of spiritual life, all are given to everyone through the merits of Christ. Wesley clearly identifies it as a gift from God.

Wesley is also well aware that some will be lost. The responsibility for

their condemnation is due to their own unbelief and resistance to grace. It is this knowledge that keeps him from going to a position of universalism. In this context of balance (or tension), Wesley tries to be fair with his Biblical texts.

In demonstrating this balance, he discusses several verses. He sees 2 Corinthians 5:14 as evidence that Christ has died for all. This, he argues, affirms the fact that Christ’s death has touched all. He then refers to 1 John 2:2. Christ’s being the propitiation

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for the world, Wesley contends, is the consequence of His dying for all. This is an important point. Christ is not merely the propitiation for the believer. As a consequence of dying for all, He is the propitiation for all, and He intercedes for all.

The aim or design of His death and intercession is that all should live for Him. In order to support this, Wesley

refers back to 2 Corinthians 5:15. Here Paul states that “those who live should . . . live . . . unto Him who died for them.” As all have been benefited by the death of Christ, so all should now live in response to that death.¹⁰

Holding a broad view of the work of Christ gave Wesley a wide conception of those that will finally be saved. It is this charitable view of salvation that I have termed “limited universalism.” Wesley believed that because of the universal effect of the death of Christ, which gives preventing grace, people can be saved without ever personally responding to a proclamation of the gospel. This is brought out in his sermon *On Faith*. There he describes different aspects or levels of faith. In so doing, he touched upon various groups, such as Diests, the heathen, Mahometans and Jews, and their relation to salvation. In speaking of the heathen, Wesley allows their salvation without their ever having heard the gospel: “Inasmuch as to them little is given, of them little will be required. . . . No more therefore will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had.” What is important is their response to the work of the “true light” (John 1:9) within their hearts. And so “many of them, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among Heathens, yet were quite aware of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion.”¹¹

Here Wesley again leans heavily on personal experience. It is not necessary for an individual to hear the gospel or respond intelligently to Christ. A continual response to the work of grace is sufficient. Wesley would not want this to be misunderstood as any lowering of the importance of preaching the gospel. This is necessary to help bring people to a fuller knowledge of God and to perfection. Still, one can be saved without a direct response to the gospel.

Here Wesley displays the broad net of salvation that he casts. Although he

sees truth in the teaching on original sin, he also argues that no one remains in that condition. All have had the moving of preventing grace upon their mind and heart. The guilt of Adam has been removed by the merits of Christ. Therefore the possibility exists for even those who have never heard of Christ to be eternally saved.

Again it must be stressed that this is solely due to Christ's atoning work. The heathen are not saved on the merit of their deeds. It is the grace of Christ which inwardly teaches them the principles of true religion. Wesley is able to keep the doctrines of human inability to move toward salvation and human responsibility in balance. This is because of his harmony between his view of original sin and preventing grace. Anything that a person does in the Christian walk, is *already* a response to the initiating activity of God.

Through the work of the second Adam, God has begun a spiritual fire in every soul. The human agent can respond or quench the burning embers. Yet even that ability to respond is already a gift from God. In this way, God's honor and justice are maintained. God is shown to be clear of the responsibility for sin and the sinners' final punishment. God also receives the praise for that good the human agent

does. After commenting on Philipians 2:12,13 he stated: "Why the very power to 'work together with Him' was from God. Therefore to Him is all the glory."¹²

Despite difficulties, temptations and heaviness of mind, one can still live to bring God glory. This was Wesley's aim in life. Notwithstanding the spiritual battles that Wesley himself felt, a knowledge of God's love sustained him. Even in his death, he was able to exclaim, "Best of all, God is with us. Best of all, God is with us." Truly Wesley understood that God had been with him—indeed, he is with all of us—from the womb to the grave.

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- 1 http://sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=20964&forum=34&1 as of Nov 12, 2009.
 - 2 John Wesley, *Wesley's Works*, vol. 7 (London:John Mason, 1829), 379.
 - 3 Ibid., 382.
 - 4 An interesting aside in this discussion is Wesley's view toward *persons* who hold this view. Although clearly abhorring the doctrine, he often states his love for those holding it. For example, in his sermon *Predestination Calmly Considered*, he appeals to predestinarians to join with him in declaring the importance and nature of holiness. Also, he states "if we serve God our agreement is far greater than our difference." Here is a

striking amount of tolerance. Wesley feels that those who hold the doctrine of predestination do so "in the uprightness of [their] hearts."

This is a mark of the breadth of Wesley's charity. He is evidently granting to Calvinistic Methodists the same room he desires from the Church of England. In the sermon *The Ministerial Office*, written in 1789, he states "we require no unity of opinions . . . but barely that they 'fear God and work righteousness.' " It is a good position for us to hold to those who might differ from us on certain theological points, yet labor with us as fellow ministers.

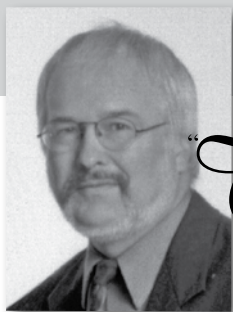
- 5 Wesley, 44 *Sermons*, 539.
- 6 <http://new.gb-gm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/43/> as of Nov 12, 2009.
- 7 Wesley, *Wesley's Works*, vol. 10, 232.
- 8 ---, vol. 3, 207.
- 9 John Wesley, *Wesley's Works*, vol. 7 (London:John Mason, 1829), 277-8.
- 10 ---, vol. 10, 225.
- 11 ---, vol. 7, 197.
- 12 Op. cit., 230.

Steven Grabiner is the executive vice-president of Outpost Centers International, an organization that networks over 65 ministries in 30 countries. His current responsibilities include fostering new ministries, and mentoring young leaders. He has served as a pastor (in Southern New England), missionary, evangelist and educator. He and his wife Vivian, with their youngest child Jeremy, live in Collegedale TN.

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The “Work” of “Believing”

By Arnet Mathers



“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).¹

At first this passage seems to imply that *we* have *work* to do, and then it seems to say that it is really *God* who does the work. So then, if it is really God who does the work *in* us both “to will” and “to do,” what is the work we are to do “with fear and trembling”?

Consider the word “therefore.” To what does it point? What came before this passage to serve as a foundation for what it says? Paul has just finished saying, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (verse 5), followed by an account of Christ’s willing humiliation step by step from equality with God to death as the scum of the earth. Christ’s willingness to humble Himself to the lowest depths available in the universe becomes the grounds of His exaltation above every name that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath. So what is the “therefore” that we must work out “with fear and trembling”?

“Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:5-7).

This passage points out that we need to trust something outside ourselves, namely God. But there’s the rub. We were born trusting no one but ourselves, and life’s experiences have confirmed to us over and over that the only person we can really trust to always be on our side is self. How can we learn in our heart of

hearts that God is more trustworthy to do the right thing for us every time than even self? How often head and heart are in mortal conflict over this very point!

Jesus prayed, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). This isn’t just any casual knowledge. The same word can be used to describe the intimate knowledge a couple can share between them that results in progeny. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Psalm 34:8). In His prayer Jesus reveals that more is involved in gaining eternal life than knowing about God. We need an intimate and personal “experience” with God. “To know Him is to love Him.”² When we taste, we will *know* that the Lord is “good.” Then we reap the blessings reserved for those who “trust in Him.”

When the Jews came asking Jesus, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” He answered, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:28-29). At first glance we may be tempted to think, “What kind of ‘work’ is ‘believing’?” It is, however, crucial that we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and not get above the job He has given us. The frailty of humanity is no match for the powers of evil arrayed against it.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23).

What is the divine method for our change? “Believe in Jesus whom God sent.” How do we obtain faith? “It is a gift” (Ephesians 2:8). “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17)

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are not called to fight the battle against evil by gritting our teeth and trying harder.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Corinthians 10:4-6).

Instead of trying harder, we are instructed to behold “the glory of the Lord,” to hear “the word of God,” to “believe in Him whom He sent,” to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

God’s promise in return is, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:10).

It is vital that we fight the fight of faith, and not battle in the strength of our flesh. “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).

1 Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures taken from the *New King James Version*.

2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), 22.

Arnet Mathers, and his wife, Lorraine, and foster children, live in Bennington, Vermont, where he is the pastor of the SW Vermont District. From an early age Arnet has had a sense that the part of truth that makes it “moral” is on an inner spiritual and relational plane. That has been his guiding light as he looks more deeply into the teachings of Scripture. Jesus must be all and in all. He worked in publishing ministries before entering pastoral ministry. The past sixteen years he has pastored in southern Illinois and southwestern Vermont.



There is a tension in our church. It is a tension between doctrinal purity and social awareness. Sometimes when

we are compelled to respond to needs in the community, we take it to be the sole purpose for our existence as a church. It is good as individuals and speaks well of our Christianity if we are ministering to the physical needs of our fellow man, but is this the purpose for which the Seventh-day Adventist church was called into being?

At the risk of being singular and anti-social, I dare say “Nay.” The Seventh-day Adventist church was called into existence for the proclamation of the Third Angel’s Message.¹ If we do not know what that message is, then time spent researching that topic would reward us. Related phrases to search are “justification by faith,” “laying the glory of man in the dust,” and “the cleansing of the sanctuary.”

It is true: The Bible says that faith without works is dead (see James 2:17). I would go a step further and even say that faith without works is not faith. Faith will work when we truly appreciate all that Calvary means to us. When we see a fellow human in need, our faith constrains us to act. At the same time, when that person sees how much we care, he may be more interested in what we believe concerning spiritual matters.

But our faith will also compel us to acquire as deep and thorough a knowledge of the cross, our salvation from sin, closing events, and church history as is possible for us to understand. Eternal life begins now. If we are going to be studying the science of salvation throughout all eternity,² and we have begun eternal life, then we are studying that science diligently. Don’t get side-tracked! Don’t resist the drawing of the Holy Spirit to do a deeper study of the judgment hour message. Present these topics in your

sermons and encourage your people to take notes and study them at home and converse about them wherever possible. Agitate the people. Jesus is waiting for his wife to understand (see Revelation 19:7). Be a champion and a wonderful friend to Jesus who has been a wonderful Friend to you. Don’t be ashamed. He is not ashamed of you.

Here is an example of something that might happen when you start paying attention. My teenage son was doing something foolish that publicly embarrassed me and exerted a wrong influence and would have opened the door to more foolishness if he hadn’t been caught. Because of his actions I trusted him less and let him know. So he angrily told me that if I didn’t let him do certain things any more, it would only bring about the very events I was trying to prevent. He said it so passionately that I believed him, and, were it not for the counsel of a true and caring friend and my wiser and older sister, my son’s smoke screen would still be blinding me.

I would go a step further and even say that faith without works is not faith. Faith will work when we truly appreciate all that Calvary means to us.

The judgment hour message does not make us more like the world (see Matthew 6:24; James 4:4). And if people in our lives are harmonizing with the world, we will not harmonize with them. Does that mean we will be unattractive? Only to those who are constantly resisting the matchless charms of Jesus. Again, I implore you, do not be ashamed of Him. He was not ashamed of you (see Hebrews 2:11). I would rather lose

every friend on earth, and even my own husband and children, than disappoint my Friend in heaven, thus—because of my unwillingness to risk losing the world’s friendship—further delay the proclamation of the final message of warning to the world. Besides, for every friend we lose on earth, who’s to say there won’t be hundreds in heaven (see Matthew 19:29)?

At the same time, even if there weren’t ten friends in heaven for every friend we lost on earth, are not we constrained and compelled by the sheer ignominy of Christ’s existence on earth—compared to the worship of angels He received in heaven—to render to Him our heart’s service? And would not He who was willing to give up the companionship of His Son so that we could be eternally secure, also freely give us all things that we need—and even consider our wants (see Romans 8:32; Psalm 23:1)?

Dear Pastor, please do not resist His calling. Ask Him to give you the courage and the tact to present these topics from the pulpit in a winsome fashion. And ask Him to give you the light of His presence along the way. Then, shine like the stars!

- 1 See Ellen G. White, *Colporteur Ministry*. (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1953), 138.
- 2 See Idem., *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, Mich.: International Tract Society, 1894), 57.

Kristin McGuire writes from Topsham, Maine. She lives there with her husband, Norman, and their four children, Tim, Becky, Shawn, and Gavin. Before becoming active in the local church in music ministry and Sabbath School work, she served in full-time restaurant evangelism for four years and Bible work for three years after that. In 1984 she both graduated from Purdue University with a BS in General Management/Marketing and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She enjoys tennis, as well as cooking, walking, reading, and writing.

Justified by Faith—Part 1

by Ellen White



This article first appeared in the Bible Students' Library Series, April, 1893.

—Editors

When God pardons the sinner, remits the punishment he deserves, and treats him as though he had not sinned, He receives him into divine favor, and justifies him through the merits of Christ's righteousness. The sinner can be justified only through faith in the atonement made through God's dear Son, who became a sacrifice for the sins of the guilty world. No one can be justified by any works of his own. He can be delivered from the guilt of sin, from the condemnation of the law, from the penalty of transgression, only by virtue of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Faith is the only condition upon which justification can be obtained, and faith includes not only belief but trust.

Many have a nominal faith in Christ, but they know nothing of that vital dependence upon Him which appropriates the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. Of this nominal faith James says: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:19, 20). Many concede that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, but at the same time they hold themselves away from Him, and fail to repent of their sins, fail to accept of Jesus as their personal Saviour. Their faith is simply the assent of the mind and judgment to the truth; but the truth is not brought into the heart, that it might sanctify the soul and transform the character. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:29, 30). Calling and justification are not one and the same

thing. Calling is the drawing of the sinner to Christ, and it is a work wrought by the Holy Spirit upon the heart, convicting of sin, and inviting to repentance.

Many are confused as to what constitutes the first steps in the work of salvation. Repentance is thought to be a work the sinner must do for himself in order that he may come to Christ. They think that the sinner must procure for himself a fitness in order to obtain the blessing of God's grace. But while it is true that repentance must precede forgiveness, for it is only the broken and contrite heart that is acceptable to God, yet the sinner cannot bring himself to repentance, or prepare himself to come to Christ. Except the sinner repent, he cannot be forgiven; but the question to be decided is as to whether repentance is the work of the sinner or the gift of Christ. Must the sinner wait until he is filled with remorse for his sin before he can come to Christ? The very first step to Christ is taken through the drawing of the Spirit of God; as man responds to this drawing, he advances toward Christ in order that he may repent.

The sinner is represented as a lost sheep, and a lost sheep never returns to the fold unless he is sought after and brought back to the fold by the shepherd. No man of himself can repent, and make himself worthy of the blessing of justification. The Lord Jesus is constantly seeking to impress the sinner's mind and attract him to behold Himself, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. We cannot take a step toward spiritual life save as Jesus draws and strengthens the soul, and leads us to experience that repentance which needeth not to be repented of.

When before the high priests and Sadducees, Peter clearly presented the fact that repentance is the gift of God. Speaking of Christ, he said, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give

repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). Repentance is no less the gift of God than are pardon and justification, and it cannot be experienced except as it is given to the soul by Christ. If we are drawn to Christ, it is through His power and virtue. The grace of contrition comes through Him, and from Him comes justification.

Paul writes: "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:6-10).

The faith that is unto salvation is not a casual faith, it is not the mere consent of the intellect, it is belief rooted in the heart, that embraces Christ as a personal Saviour, assured that He can save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. To believe that He will save others, but will not save you is not genuine faith; but when the soul lays hold upon Christ as the only hope of salvation, then genuine faith is manifested. This faith leads its possessor to place all the affections of the soul upon Christ; his understanding is under the control of the Holy Spirit, and his character is molded after the divine likeness. His faith is not a dead faith, but a faith that works by love, and leads him to behold the beauty of Christ, and to become assimilated to the divine character. "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and

with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

It is God that circumcises the heart. The whole work is the Lord’s from the beginning to the end. The perishing sinner may say: “I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’ (Mark 2:17). I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary’s cross to save me. I need not remain a moment longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised.”

Christ is a risen Saviour; for, though He was dead, He has risen again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us. We are to believe with the heart unto righteousness, and with the mouth make confession unto salvation. Those who are justified by faith will make confession of Christ. “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). The great work that is wrought for the sinner who is spotted and stained by evil is the work of justification. By Him who speaketh truth he is declared righteous. The Lord imputes unto the believer the righteousness of Christ and pronounces him righteous before the universe. He transfers his sins to Jesus, the sinner’s representative, substitute, and surety. Upon Christ He lays the iniquity of every soul that believeth. “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christ made satisfaction for the guilt of the whole world, and all who will come to God in faith, will receive the righteousness of Christ, “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Our sin has been expiated, put away, cast into the depths of the sea. Through repentance and faith we are rid of sin, and look unto the Lord our righteousness. Jesus suffered, the just for the unjust.

Although as sinners we are under the condemnation of the law, yet Christ by His obedience rendered to the law, claims for the repentant soul the merit of His own righteousness. In order to obtain the righteousness of Christ, it is necessary for the sinner to know what that repentance is which works a radical change of mind and spirit and action. The work of transformation must begin in the heart, and manifest its power through every faculty of the being; but man is not capable of originating such a repentance as this, and can experience it alone through Christ, who ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

Who is desirous of becoming truly repentant? What must he do?—He must come to Jesus, just as he is, without delay. He must believe that the word of Christ is true, and, believing the promise, ask, that he may receive. When sincere desire prompts men to pray, they will not pray in vain. The Lord will fulfill His word, and will give the Holy Spirit to lead to repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. He will pray and watch, and put away his sins, making manifest his sincerity by the vigor of his endeavor to obey the commandments of God. With prayer he will mingle faith, and not only believe in but obey the precepts of the law. He will announce himself as on Christ’s side of the question. He will renounce all habits and associations that tend to draw the heart from God.

He who would become a child of God must receive the truth that repentance and forgiveness are to be obtained through nothing less than the atonement of Christ. Assured of this the sinner must put forth an effort in harmony with the work done for him, and with unwearied entreaty he must supplicate the throne of grace, that the renovating power of God may come into his soul. Christ pardons none but the penitent, but whom He pardons He first makes penitent. The provision made is complete, and the eternal righteousness of Christ is placed to the account of every believing soul. The costly, spotless robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has been provided for the repenting, believing sinner, and he may say: “I will greatly

rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

Abundant grace has been provided that the believing soul may be kept free from sin; for all heaven, with its limitless resources, has been placed at our command. We are to draw from the well of salvation. Christ is the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believeth. In ourselves we are sinners; but in Christ we are righteous. Having made us righteous through the imputed righteousness of Christ, God pronounces us just, and treats us as just. He looks upon us as His dear children. Christ works against the power of sin, and where sin abounded, grace much more abounds. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1, 2).

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:24-26). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Ellen G. White was a prophet in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her ministry spanned over 60 years in the 19th and early 20th century.



“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”—Part 2

by Andi Hunsaker

This article is Part 2. Part 1 was in the January/February 2010 issue, also available at www.newenglandpastor.com.

—Editors

What does this type of prayer look like on a practical level? Scripture again comes to our aid, giving us powerful examples of prayer. In Ephesians 3, the apostle Paul prays one of the most powerful prayers in scripture. He starts out in verse 14 with the words, “For this reason.” This is because in verses 1-13, he describes the cross event which was in the heart of God “from the beginning of the ages” (Ephesians 3:9). So he frames his prayer upon this tapestry and prays ever so fervently that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may know and comprehend the love of Christ, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith and that we will be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:14-21). His prayer is totally God-centered.

Earlier in the same book, Paul prays that God would give us the “spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” and “that the eyes of our understanding” would be enlightened (Ephesians 1:17, 18). These prayers are not laundry lists of things we want deposited carelessly at the throne of Grace. These are prayers that bring us to our knees in earnestness, as they did Paul, not for concern for the things of this world, but for a zealously for His will. Our praying will be preoccupied with His kingdom, our being transformed into sons and daughters who really are adopted, a new creation.

Why is it important to pray *in the “will of God”*? We can look to Jesus for the answer. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays a prayer, not once but three times because He was not getting the answer He was hoping for. The gospel of Mark records this prayer as He faces the reality of death and separation from His Father, and He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not

what I will but what You will.” Three times He prays this prayer in His agony and despair but most importantly in His humanity. He cries out in two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, indicative of His gut-wrenching desperation. Three times He prays this prayer. “Lord, please give Me the answer I want but nevertheless not My will but Yours.” Praise God that prayer was not answered out of the will of God.

These prayers are not laundry lists of things we want deposited carelessly at the throne of Grace. These are prayers that bring us to our knees in earnestness, as they did Paul, not for concern for the things of this world, but for a zealously for His will.

In His humanity, Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, confronted the awfulness of the cross and this threw His mind into a state where, the Bible says, “horror and dismay came over Him.”¹ Nevertheless, because of His habitual desire to do the will of His Father, He prayed, “Not what I will, but what You will.”

I don’t want to leave the impression that only prayers for spiritual matters reach the ears of God. He is intimately concerned with our day-to-day lives. He

sees when the sparrow falls and He knows the number of hairs on our head. We have all had the experience of unanswered prayer. These prayers may not be of eternal import, but they are, nevertheless, intensely important to us.

A story is told in Matthew of a Gentile woman who had a severely demon-possessed daughter (Matthew 15:21-28). She cried out to God, the Bible says, and said to Him, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” Verse 23 says that the Lord “answered her not a word.” Can you imagine that—not a word. The ceiling was brass over her head—the Lord was silent. She continued her beseeching. When He finally answered, it was not satisfying at all. He said to her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” She did not miss a beat but came back with, “True, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the master’s table.” To which Jesus replied, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour (Matthew 15:21-28).

It was not immediately evident why Jesus did not answer, but the pen of inspiration tells us what was going on behind the scene. She says, “The Saviour manifested divine compassion toward the Syrophenician woman. His heart was touched as He saw her grief. He longed to give her an immediate assurance that her prayer was heard; but He desired to teach His disciples a lesson, and for a time He seemed to neglect the cry of a tortured heart.”² Keep asking; keep praying because God is still listening even when He seems silent. There is a reason for the delay, and we may gain comfort by trying to find out what Jesus may be trying to teach us in those trying times.

In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus begins the parable by saying that

we “always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). He goes on to tell of the widow who went to a judge who did not care for God or man. She wanted vindication from someone who was her adversary, but the judge would not hear her case for a while. But the judge thought about it and, simply because she was persistent, granted her request. Jesus then makes an analogy and says that if such a judge who cares not for anyone would answer this widow, would not God who loves and cares answer? The resounding answer is yes, and speedily.³

Then Jesus tacks on something very interesting. He says, “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the Earth?” Again the pen of inspiration is helpful here. Ellen White says of this story:

Every manifestation of God’s power for His people arouses the enmity of Satan. Every time God works in their behalf, Satan with his angels works with renewed vigor to

compass their ruin. . . . He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. . . . He endeavors to affright their souls with the thought that their case is hopeless, that the stain of their defilement can never be washed away.⁴

Satan wants to weigh us down with feelings of our unworthiness, guilt, and

Satan wants to weigh us down with feelings of our unworthiness, guilt, and shame so that when we pray we wonder aloud if indeed God cannot hear us because we are so bad.

shame so that when we pray we wonder aloud if indeed God cannot hear us because we are so bad. This is why the first verse of Luke 18 is so crucial to this passage. Jesus Himself says it best: “Men ought to pray and not lose heart.” This is the faith referred to in verse 18.

Will we have the faith to believe that indeed He has adopted us and this was the “good pleasure” of His will and persevere in prayer?

1 See Mark 14:33, NEB.

2 White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 175.

3 See Luke 18:1-8.

4 White, *Christ’s Object Lesson*, 168.

Andi Hunsaker resides in Sudbury, Massachusetts, where she lives with her husband, Bob. She is a physician practicing medicine in Boston. She teaches Sabbath School class in her home church in Stoneham, Massachusetts.

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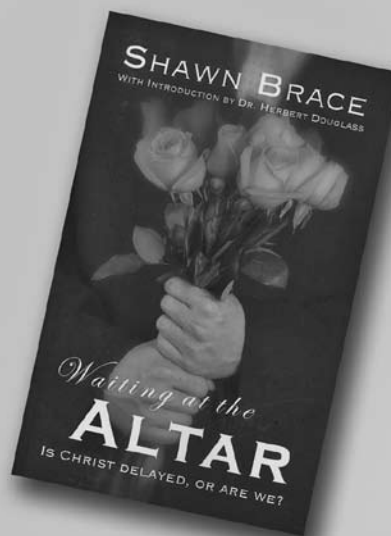
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The Covenants

By Bill Brace

It was a wonderful day. Over thirty-five years ago I heard one of my seminary professors announce, “Next week, for the entire week, we will give attention to the topic of the covenants.” To say that I felt ecstatic would have been an understatement. Here I was, a seminary student, about to go forth from the portals of the revered institution, Andrews University, as a pastor, and I knew virtually nothing about the covenants. It seemed that each time I tried to tackle the topic, I would come away more confused than I had been before. Unfortunately, at the conclusion of the next week, I was just as perplexed as I had always been. Maybe, more so! (This is no criticism of the good professor. He was a godly man whom I admired greatly. In fact, I still do, even now while he sleeps in Jesus.)

And so I went forth to pastor in the hopes that no one would ask me to give an explanation of the Old and New Covenant topic. That worry continued for several years. And then, through the showering of God’s goodness upon me, I read the recommended book, *The Glad Tidings*, by E.J. Waggoner,¹ and the pitch darkness turned into the brightest of lights.

I wonder how many of you who are reading this column right now are in the same perplexed position that I found myself for several decades of my Christian walk, even for many years as a pastor? I was perplexed because I had been taught that the basis for the covenants was “time.” That is not so. To utilize such a formula is to actually fight “old covenant” charges with “old covenant” defenses and reasoning. On occasion, utilizing such tactics, we have been publicly embarrassed when we have entered into debates in the media with those who

aggressively accuse us of legalism.

Waggoner, under, I believe, the influence of the Holy Spirit set in clear light that the old covenant and new covenant run concurrently. It is not a matter of time at all. The new covenant was in existence right from the foundation of the world and is an eternal message akin to the gospel and its eternal message. Its fruitage is a growing confidence in God and His word. The old covenant is a covenant of works which began with the entrance of sin and continues to this very day. If you would like to see this latter covenant in its unique form, read Exodus 19:1-8. Such a mentality leads to death. Two deaths actually: one the death of the Son of God, and the other your own eternal death. Israel entered into an old covenant relationship with God there at Mount Sinai, which served as their basis for relationship with God for centuries: one of a Master-servant relationship. It resulted, unfortunately, in their rejection of the messenger of the eternal covenant, Jesus Christ.

This old covenant thinking reveals itself in many subtle ways within our denomination. Just ask your typical congregation about the thought that is on many of our minds, the return of Christ: “Why do you want Jesus to come soon?” and the answers will come back, “Because I want to get out of this wicked world” or “I want to get to heaven and not worry any more about _____” (fill in any answer that denotes self-interest.) Such answers center on self; in fact, they testify that the person is still under the old covenant in his/her thinking. Incidentally, old covenant members are never happy members. And they are given to fighting with one another. In contrast, folks who experience the new covenant are joyous and happy to share themselves in ministry. These latter individuals need not to be prodded or

made to feel guilty; they are eager to share in both internal and external ministries of the Lord’s cause. Why? Because they are full of the joy of the gospel.

How does the old covenant mentality continue so widely among our laypeople? Well, is it possible many of us who are in the pulpit each Sabbath are still old covenant in our preaching and in our thinking?

Examine your preaching. Be honest with yourself. I do believe God is waiting for our pulpits to come alive with the power and the glory of new covenant concepts.

In closing, I would highly recommend two books. The aforementioned one by E.J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, is a classic. A more recent one that is built upon a wonderful relationship motif is Skip MacCarty’s, *In Granite or Ingrained?*² Skip, as many of you know, is a longtime member of the Andrews University pastoral staff. His book may be purchased through Andrews University Press.

1 E.J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings* (Paris, Ohio: Glad Tidings Publishers, 1994).

2 Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2007).

Bill Brace has been involved in urban ministry for over twenty-five years. He pastors Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Braintree and Norwood, Massachusetts. In addition, he maintains an active radio ministry. His program “Portraits of God” is currently heard on several stations around the United States. He and his wife, Melanie, live in Norfolk, Massachusetts, and they have three grown children, one son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, and three beautiful grandchildren.

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